

LES MISSIONS DES OBLATS DE MARIE - VOL. 80^e - N.° 283 - SEPTEMBRE 1953

MISSIONS

DE

LA CONGREGATION

DES

Missionnaires Oblats

DE

MARIE IMMACULÉE

80^{ème} TOME (1953)

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R E P O R T
ON ST. MARY'S PROVINCE (CANADA)
to the General Chapter of 1953

It is comparatively easy to get a bird's eye-view of St. Mary's Province. By studying a map of Canada, one will learn that, territorially, St. Mary's Province is co-extensive with all the other Oblate provinces in the country, stretching, as it does, from Ottawa to the Pacific coast, with foundations along the American border in the south and, in the north, posts at Noranda and Rouyn in Quebec, Kirkland Lake in Ontario, through northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan up to Peace River in northern Alberta. Vast as it is, the geographical aspect of St. Mary's Province does not present any major problem in this modern age of easy communications. Nor does the religious life of the members of our province suffer therefrom. Thanks be to God, we have unity in spite of extension a factor which makes for easier administration and religious fidelity.

The specialized work of St. Mary's Province is to be found among the new arrivals to Canada, and therefore among the poorest and the most abandoned. It is for this reason that we feel God has been exceedingly good to us. Since the foundation of our Province 25 years ago, our personnel has more than tripled itself, representing an increase of over 300% i.e. from 52 members in 1926 to 175 members at present. Since the last General Chapter it has shown an increase of 29%, notwithstanding the loss of 15 Fathers due to death, transfers, and the sending of young Fathers into the mission fields.

During this rapid development, however, we have also had our difficulties. In fact, we still suffer from

lack of personnel. It is only through the self-denial and tireless efforts of our Fathers, Scholastics and Lay-Brothers, that we were able to found, maintain and enlarge all our own houses of formation. But lack of personnel will remain one of our problems for a long time to come. The situation is such because of the constant and numerous requests being made of us by the hierarchy in this country. All of our Fathers speak two languages, and many of them are proficient in three languages, so that our Fathers are especially well adapted to tend to the spiritual welfare of more than half a million Catholic immigrants who have taken up residence in Canada since the second world war. The government as well as the Bishops make requests for priests who can speak the language of these newcomers.

Conducting our houses of formation, tending to the spiritual needs of immigrants and helping them to rehabilitate themselves, ministering to Catholics in little country places—this is the work of St. Mary's Province in Canada.

Personnel:

At the present time, our Province counts 121 Fathers, 3 Scholastic Fathers, 34 Scholastics and 17 Lay Brothers. Besides that we have 8 Scholastic Novices and 4 Lay Brother Novices. In 1947 we had 102 Fathers, 26 Scholastics and 8 Lay Brothers. In six years, therefore, we have had an increase of 40 members in the personnel of the Province—this in spite of the loss of no less than 15 members since the last General Chapter.

The average age of our Fathers is 46. We have 12 Fathers who are over 70 years of age, and 3 who are over 80 years of age. Yet all of these are in active ministry and carry full time responsibilities.

Actually we have at least 6 Fathers who should be retired. They should have the rest which they have merited so well. But due to the lack of per-

sonnel and due to the ever increasing demands of the hierarchy, we simply have to use everybody. Young Fathers graduating from our Scholasticate must, for the most part, be assigned to our houses of formation. And because the latter take priority over all our other works, we have at times been obliged to abandon some of our isolated missions. The happy solution would be to transfer the responsibility of more of these missions, so that we might be in a better position to centralize and consolidate our Oblate works, and thus be able to establish also a more stable way of religious life.

If we could count on at least a dozen new Fathers every year, we feel that, besides being able to supply our own needs, we could also send some into foreign mission fields. Our Scholastics are very mission-minded. To date, however, we have been averaging only five new Fathers yearly. The net result is that we are desperately understaffed. Had it not been for a number of Polish Fathers who came to this country after the war, we would not have been able to cope with the tremendous amount of work we have had to undertake. Now that this source has been exhausted, we must rely entirely on our own resources.

Recruitment:

Our particular form of ministry places us in a rather favorable position for recruiting vocations. We look after many small missions, and it is in these places that one finds, quite abundantly, untarnished souls with deep faith and a hardy spirit of sacrifice. The children and youth of these places, observing the devotedness of our Fathers are naturally inspired with high ideals of missionary and religious life.

It is true that all places do not respond in equal measure. Much depends upon the example given by the missionary and by his interest in young men and in vocations. It has been our observation that it is usually those Fathers, who some are inclined to

describe as being « strict and old-fashioned », who really foster vocations—not the « mixers » and the « good sports. »

Of late our city parishes, with the exception of Toronto, have been slipping as far as vocations are concerned. There are various reasons for this. One of our Fathers, who recently made a thorough study and investigation of this problem concludes that it is mostly due to lack of family life and to a spirit of worldliness and materialism. Children are no longer trained to make sacrifice, but seek only a « good time. » It would be gratifying, indeed, if our city parishes responded as well as our rural missions. We might also make mention, however, that we have lost a few vocations due to « the gentle process of sheep stealing » for the seminaries where the standard of studies is not as exacting.

We do not have a man assigned as vocational director, but in the last three years special efforts have been made to cultivate « vocation-mindedness » in every member of the Province.

Works:

The Ministry:

It would be superfluous and uninteresting to enumerate, statistically, all the works of our ministry, since all follow more or less the same pattern. We have 75 churches with resident priests, to which are attached 85 Fathers. In addition we have 95 mission churches which have no resident priests. Hence we have about 170 places in our charge, which average two places for each Father. Consequently even Fathers who are over 75 years of age must binate in two missions each Sunday.

We tend to the spiritual needs of about 80,000 Catholics. In the city of Toronto alone, we minister to 25,000 Polish Catholics, all of whom are to be found in three parishes looked after by only 6 Fa-

thers. The ministry in these three parishes is made all the more difficult due to the majority of the parishioners being immigrants. While on the western prairies, the numbers may not be so great, there are still great distances to contend with.

In the overall, there are 1,000 souls for every Father in our Province.

Districts:

Since most of our Fathers must live alone and are therefore deprived of regular community life, we have formed so-called « Oblate Districts. » These districts are composed of about a dozen mission posts and residences with a superior and two assistants. The Fathers of each district convene at least once a month for retreats and theological conferences. As a rule, the Fathers are not only very conscientious about attending these retreats, but look forward to them with eager anticipation since it affords them the opportunity of seeing each other. We feel that these monthly gatherings are a Godsend, because isolation can be a torture.

At present we have 11 such districts and we find that it is a happy solution for an abnormal situation. Gradually the Fathers begin to realize that they are not alone but that they belong to a community with consequent duties, privileges and responsibilities. In this way too our ministry is more effective because we have uniformity and continuity.

In the last few years, the Toronto district has been developing very rapidly. Three years ago we started a new parish of St Casimir in Toronto with 250 families. To-day St Casimir has over a thousand families. Four years ago we took over a poor, little parish in St Catherine. To date the attendance, Holy Communion and income have increased sevenfold. We bought a stretch of land, built a new church and rectory and subdivided the rest of that property into lots and sold them to our own people. Now the City

of St Catherine has a new sub-division with a street called « *Oblate Avenue* ». Yes, we are building and building. Many country districts, however, are on the decline, because of great influx of the rural population into the cities. This is especially true of southern Saskatchewan. Some of the country parishes and missions have been depleted by almost 25% since the war. This is a matter for grave concern. The government too has been trying to remedy this regrettable tendency. Many of our Fathers have been making efforts to encourage their people to stay on the land. Notably among these is Father Timothy Riffel, who is presently a member of the diocesan and governmental boards for rural life amelioration. We feel that our Oblate districts have certainly been a help in this regard. People of the same faith and of the same ethnic origin will not be so eager to separate themselves from their own.

Education:

From its very inception, our Province has been vitally interested in education. The beginnings of our educational institutions were made at the cost of great sacrifice. Due to an acute shortage of personnel, we were compelled to use Scholastics to assist in teaching at St. Paul's College, Winnipeg, Manitoba. To this day, we give our best to our houses of formation. But it is also our efforts in the field of education that has paid us our best dividends.

The College:

We began our education endeavors with St. Paul's College, Winnipeg. After four years of operation it was deemed expedient to move this nursery of vocations to a more centrally located point of our works. Accordingly, we purchased the old parliament building of the North West Territories at Battleford, Saskatchewan. It became at once a Juniorate and a Scholasticate. It remains our Scholastic-

ate to this day, while the Juniorate has been moved to North Battleford.

After having operated the two institutions as one for sometime, the need to separate them became evident and imperative. To realize this, a fund-raising drive was launched in 1946. With the funds realized from this campaign, we were able to build our present St. Thomas College at North Battleford. It was opened in 1950, and we feel that it is a credit to St. Mary's Province and to the Congregation. Presently, there are 170 boys there who are being taught, trained and formed in the best Oblate traditions by 12 young Fathers.

House of Studies, Toronto:

From the same drive for funds mentioned above, we were able to purchase a place in Toronto. It is called « The Oblate House of Studies » and is, in reality, nothing else but a Juniorate. We have a happy arrangement there whereby boys attend classes at St. Michael's College (directed by the Basilian Fathers), and at the Juniorate receive Oblate direction and formation from the two Fathers who are in charge of this institution. To date, the results in vocations at our House of Studies in Toronto have been very gratifying.

St. Charles Scholasticate, Battleford:

Our Scholasticate at Battleford began in a very humble way. Today, materially speaking, it is still poor. Though we have no pretentious house, we certainly do have a *Home*. It is, indeed, the very soul of our Province. We say this, not because it is the largest house of our Province, nor because it is one of the larger houses of the Congregation in Canada (there are over 80 Oblates in this house), but because of the very wonderful spirit that has always prevailed within the walls of our Scholasticate. It

is imbued, deeply, with the spirit of true charity and pioneering endeavors.

Father Michael O'Ryan, O.M.I., assistant-general, in making his canonical report on our Scholasticate wrote as follows: « So far as my visit to St. Charles Scholasticate is concerned, I have nothing but praise for all those who form this happy Oblate community. Rarely, if ever, have I come across a religious body more genuinely united in true fraternal friendship. All seemed to be animated by the spirit of « bearing one another's burdens » and bound together for the sublime purpose of contributing, each in his own way, towards the common good, by hard work and fervent prayer. »

During the 20 years of its existence, our Scholasticate has given us and to others 80 priests. Today we have there 9 Fathers (two of whom are with the Press establishment), 2 Scholastic Fathers, 46 Scholastic Brothers, (15 of these belonging to the Belleville Province), 17 Lay Brothers and four Lay Brother Novices.

Our Scholasticate is critically understaffed. Because we regard the Scholasticate as the most important work of our Province, we shall do our utmost to remedy this situation as soon as possible.

The Press:

Although our Province is barely more than 25 years old, we have had almost half a century in Catholic press work. Shortly after founding our first Polish parish of the Holy Ghost in Winnipeg, and that of St. Joseph's for the German speaking people in the same city, our Fathers formed the West Canada Publishing Company. This firm published papers in Polish, German and Ruthenian. During the First World war the German paper was suppressed, and just a year ago, due to lack of personnel, the *Gazeta Polska* was amalgamated with another Polish paper, *Głos Polski*, in Toronto. The latter, while not de-

nominationally a religious paper, is nevertheless Catholic by inspiration.

In the meantime, our Province began to publish in 1932 a German Catholic monthly *der Marienbote*. It was originally intended and used as a parish bulletin for St. Mary's parish, Regina, Saskatchewan, but it soon evolved as a regular monthly magazine and had its circulation extended to German speaking Catholics throughout Canada. Its purpose was then and still is to instil Christian principles of conduct into family life, and also to serve as a means of promoting the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate. Its circulation is small, but it still serves a very worthwhile purpose.

When the Marian Press was moved from Regina to Battleford in 1948, we launched a new English monthly magazine entitled *Our Family*. This new English monthly, now in only its fifth year of publication, is designed as a magazine of general reading interest with the emphasis on the Christian aspect of family life. It has not, in any way, been employed to serve as an organ for propagandizing Oblate works, recruiting Oblate funds and vocations, nor is it intended that it shall ever be used to serve such ends. It is motivated solely by the needs and specific ends of the Apostolate of the Catholic press—a work concerning which the Popes, and in particular Pope Pius X, issued such grave statements. *Our Family* seeks to give Catholic readers what they *need* to read, in the way that they will *want* to read it. It will not seek to acquire from readers that which its publishers need by way of funds assembled through burses, good will appeals, etc. Without wishing to discredit in any way the worthiness of the motives which prompted the many shrine and mission magazines to have their origin, we feel there is room for and need of a strong, virile Canadian monthly magazine which will go into the homes of English speaking Catholics, solely to inform, instruct and

uplift them in the pertinent and essential factors of life which affects them as Catholics and as men. To this end, every effort will be expended to constantly improve the editorial quality of *Our Family* and to bring it as a veritable « extension of the Church's teaching voice » into as many Catholic Canadian homes as possible.

At Battleford we have our own Press establishment at which are employed two Fathers and two Lay Brothers. These Fathers and Brothers deserve recognition and have our appreciation because theirs is an ungrateful work. Yet the Apostolate of the Press is so very important. « The pen is mightier than the sword. »

Missions :

Strictly speaking, we have no mission band. Yet our Fathers are always preaching missions. The Father in charge of the Missionary Association is on the road constantly. And throughout the length and breadth of our Province there is always some Father preaching a mission or a retreat, so much so that we can safely say that there are at least two Fathers who preach continually.

We would like to have a mission band for this primary Oblate work, but to date, we have not been able to form it. God willing, we will begin one as soon as we have two more Fathers to spare. The demands are so great that we will do everything possible to fulfill this all important end of the Congregation.

Immigration:

The « raison d'être » of our Province is to look after new Canadians. Consequently the work of immigration has always been held in high regard in our Province. It has been brought to the fore in every part of our vast Province from the very beginning

of its existence. With the recent influx of hundreds of thousands of Catholic immigrants to Canada, this work has taken on new and added importance. The hierarchy of Canada, divided for some time on the policy of immigration, has now agreed to coordinate the several Catholic agencies, and to work wholeheartedly for this great cause. We were asked to assist in this work which is so dear to the heart of the Holy Father. Accordingly, we assigned two of our Fathers, especially qualified for this line of work. Presently, one of these Fathers is the field man for Canada in Europe, while the other is in charge of the immigration office in Canada.

Apart from these two Fathers who are « *ex officio* » in charge of immigration, most of our Fathers are associated, either directly or indirectly, with this work in their respective fields of labor. But it is in the city parishes especially where immigration work occupies so much time of our Fathers. One Father, has personally helped over 1,000 immigrants in rehabilitating themselves. Among other things, this meant finding work and lodging for them, and helping them to be reunited with their families. Of late, another Father has been engaged in the same type of work. In Regina and Winnipeg, these immigrants turn almost instinctively to our Fathers. And in Eastern Canada, where the bulk (75%) of newcomers to Canada establish themselves (in cities like Toronto and Ottawa, for example), our Fathers must be « *all things* » to all these thousands of unfortunate immigrants. We may safely say that our Fathers have acquitted themselves honorably in the work of immigration, which we feel is most in keeping with our motto, for if anybody is poor, certainly these unfortunate refugees, D.P.s and homeless people qualify for that title.

Association of Mary Immaculate.

Due to lack of personnel, the Association of Mary Immaculate in our Province, until just last year,

was simply « vegetating. » Now, with the appointment of a regular director, this praiseworthy work of our Congregation is coming into its own. An office has been set up, and a drive for new members has made the whole Province « Association-conscious. » The result is that we have more laity praying for the extension of our works and also material help is forthcoming. But the most salutary feature of this truly wonderful work is that we are gaining more and more Oblate friends. The Association is a two-way street, as it were; the Associates feel that they really belong to the great Oblate Family, and come to us with their prayers and help, and we go to them in gratitude with our counsel, guidance and spiritual assistance.

Our needs:

We need only one thing: More men.

Conclusion:

The steady growth and progress of our Province is a testimony of God's blessing upon it. And this blessing, in turn, is a proof that we are trying to be worthy of our vocation. « Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me, Pauperes Evangelizantur. » We began with the poor and we are staying with them. Our Province took its roots from the need of the immigrants. Its present work consists mainly in caring for these people and for their descendants. We are filling the need expressed by our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, in his recent Constitution « *Exul Familia*. » This need will continue for many years to come. « It will be the honor and the glory of the members of our Province to be able to speak to them in their own language and to preserve them for the Faith. » And if the past is any indication of what the future will be, then we can look with confidence for the things to come.

Inspite of the fact that we have a goodly number of aged Fathers, our Province is brimming with vitality and has the spirit of « go to it. » Our younger Fathers, especially, are striving for stability without immobility, for tradition with eagerness and with vision. As an example I can quote Cardinal Mc Guigan of Toronto, who told me recently: « Your Fathers have done wonders in my diocese. » And all the Bishops, in whose dioceses our Fathers are at work, have nothing but praise for them, and are continually asking for more men.

Inspite of the numerous and scattered fields of labor which isolate our Fathers, they are, on the whole, as good religious as can be expected under the circumstances. It is true we have our shortcomings, but by and large, all are proud of being Oblates of Mary Immaculate and all try to do honor to Her Congregation.

Our prayer is:

« May our Province, placed under the patronage of the Mother of God, continue to enjoy Her protection. May she nurture it and foster its growth. May she give it unity and strength so that it may ever be fruitful in good works and holiness, that these may redound to the greater glory of God and His Church. »

FR. STANLEY WACHOWICZ, O.M.I.
Provincial.